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Finding a permanent place for secretary of state to hang his hat

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Washington

The President has the White House. The vice-president has a mansion on the grounds of the National Observatory, along Washington's fashionable Embassy Row.

Now it's about time the secretary of state also has an official residence, says Clement Conger, curator of the White House and the State Department.

Every time a new secretary of state takes office, it costs the US government close to \$400,000 to transform the personal residence into the secure fortress needed today for safety, Mr. Conger says. And with a new secretary taking office every three years or so, the bill runs up in a hurry.

"Soon it will be \$500,000 or \$600,000. How much better it would be if we had a permanent residence."

So far, the search has been anything but an all-out effort. Conger, who describes himself as a "one-man search committee," says it's been mostly a matter of letting people know of the need and waiting for the right property to come along.

"We're not contemplating a purchase right now," he says. "We're still hoping that with publicity and time someone will decide to donate the right house."

So far, the government has had a number of options, but for a variety of reasons none has been selected.

One was for an elegant Georgetown mansion, the home of former Secretary of Defense James Forrestal. Conger says the problem was that it was built on a hillside. "It was very unsatisfactory because everything was up and down steps."

Another offer was for a historic red mansion in downtown Washington, two blocks from the White

House. It was the home of Presidents James Madison and Martin Van Buren and Chief Justice John Marshall. But Conger says it was too close to the street to be acceptable to the Secret Service.

The property Conger liked best was a spacious mansion in a prestigious northwest

Washington neighborhood. "It was isolated, with a large front yard and 12 or 13 acres of land. I thought it would be a nice place for the secretary of state," Conger says. The problem this time? Before any options were discussed the estate — called "Rocks in Crestwood" — was purchased by its namesake, freshman West Virginia Sen. John D. Rockefeller IV (D).

While Conger prefers a residence located in the District of Columbia, suburban Maryland or Virginia would be fine.

Conger also says, "It need not be a grand estate. A modest house is quite acceptable." In the past, he says, secretaries of state entertained in their own homes. Now they have access to the department's newly refurbished diplomatic reception rooms.

The only thing that's not negotiable is security, Conger says. The Secret Service requires that the residence be set back from the street approximately 50 feet.

Purchase of an official residence would require a special appropriation from Congress. Meanwhile, Conger is hopeful a public-spirited citizen will donate a suitable home.

Conger scoffs at the notion that providing a residence for the secretary of state will start a stampede among other Cabinet officers for official homes of their own. The same security considerations could apply to the secretary of defense and the director of the Central Intelligence Agency, Conger says. "But I don't see any need for it to go beyond that."